BALTIMORE SUN
15 MAY 1972

Life claims mining split Nixon aides

New York (Reuter)—President Nixon's closest advisers were split over his decision to mine North Vietnamese harbors and escalate the bombing, according to *Life* magazine.

In an article in its current issue, the magazine says that John B. Connally, Secretary of the Treasury, firmly supported the President's decision, but that Henry A. Kissinger and Melvin R. Laird, secretary of defense, had doubts, as did officials in the State and Defense Departments and the Central Intelligence Agency.

During White House deliberations, *Life* says, "another Nixon aide was heard to mutter not once, but several times, 'we ought to nuke 'em' "—an allusion to use of nuclear weapons.

Informing congressional leaders of his decision just before his television speech, *Life* says, Mr. Nixon told them: "They spit in our eye in Paris. What else can we do."

Five weeks before his decision to escalate the war, *Life* says, Mr. Nixon "felt that his whole plan for world stability was falling into place just as he had wanted it to. His China summit had been a success; Russia seemed eager to limit nuclear weapons to stabilize Europe. The Moscow summit gleamed ahead as another presidential spectacular, providing, in addition, the prospect of real progress toward peace."

But then Dr. Kissinger's secret trip to the negotiation table in Paris "was a disaster," *Life* says, and the North Vietnamese began their offensive.

"It is by such dashed hopes that his disappointment must be measured," the magazine says. "It's depth is still not fully appreciated."

NEWSWEEK
19 MAY 1972

What Went Wrong in Vietnam: The Fallacies in U.S. Policy

1

Maynard Parker—Newsweek

Intelligence

In its efforts to outguess the North Vietnamese, the U.S. has employed an impressive array of intelligence-gathering equipment—computers, reconnaissance aircraft, even electronic sensors that can detect enemy soldiers moving through jungles and along darkened trails. Yet for all this modern wizardry, American intelligence repeatedly has misjudged Hanoi's capabilities and intentions. Even when the North Vietnamese were gearing up for their current offensive, the Nixon Administration clung to the belief that the Communists were incapable of inflicting real damage on South Vietnam: Asked in November if the Communists could mount a major campaign in the near future, Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, replied, "They would not have the capacity or the capability for an operation such as you describe." And that same month, Mr. Nixon said, "The enemy doesn't have the punch that it had."

The reason for this massive failure of U.S. intelligence is not hard to find. "After the allied invasions of Cambodia and Laos," reported NEWSWEEK's Pentagon correspondent, Lloyd Norman, "the U.S. military kidded themselves into believing that the Communist supply caches and logistics system had been badly damaged if not wrecked." The penchant for self-delusion did not end there. Months ago, captured enemy documents clearly indicated that Hanoi was planning an offensive for February or March. Said one U.S. official: "Some people in the Pentagon laughed when the attacks didn't come when we predicted." Even after the North Vietnamese began their offensive on Easter Sunday—backing up their infantry with 130-mm. artillery pieces, missile and rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns and no less than 500 tanks—Pentagon officials predicted that the Communists would run out of supplies by mid-May. Yet as the fighting raged into its sixth week, there was no sign that the Communists were short of matériel. They poured 6,000 rounds of artillery shells into Quang Tri city in one three-day period and blasted An Loc with up to 1,000 shells a day. Now, Administration officials ruefully concede that Hanoi might be able to sustain such attacks for months.

The American intelligence network was equally inept at assessing Communist tactics. While the U.S. command believed that some sort of Communist offensive was in the works, it clung to the view that the assault would come in the central highlands—not across the Demilitarized Zone. And even when that judgment proved dramatically wrong, official optimism still prevailed.

Perhaps the biggest surprise of all was the appearance of massive numbers of North Vietnamese tanks in South Vietnam. "The electronic sensors," said a top U.S. intelligence analyst, "did not always pick them up, and they showed up in South Vietnam in places where they were least expected. The enemy had widened the roads and built more roads to enable the movement of tracked vehicles. Some were seen on the trails, but no one estimated the numbers that finally showed up."

Whether the faulty analysis of North Vietnam's capabilities was the result of wishful thinking or honest mistakes will be debated for years. But the fact is that Hanoi's successes to date raise serious questions about the way American military intelligence is gathered—and the way U.S. political leaders interpret the data they receive. It is an ageless military maxim to "know your enemy." But the U.S. appears to be singularly unable to understand either the mind or the determination of the North Vietnamese despite the abundance of information American intelligence has gathered over the years. And even when the Administration's advisers have been on target with their assessments of Hanoi's abilities and goals, their advice often has been ignored. That combination of shortcomings could turn out to be a formula for disaster for American foreign policy.

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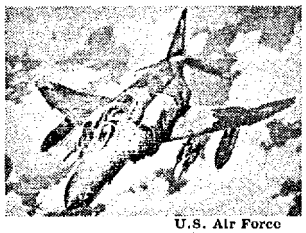

U.S. Air Force

Bombing

The sobering spectacle of Communist tanks and heavy artillery operating deep inside South Vietnam raises serious questions about the ultimate effectiveness of U.S. air power in Indochina. But despite that, President Nixon has clung to his conviction that massive American bombing attacks can stem the Communist tide. In his nationally televised report two weeks ago on the renewed fighting in Vietnam, Mr. Nixon warned that U.S. air strikes "will not stop until the invasion stops." Officially, the Administration offered the explanation that the bombing was designed to aid the South Vietnamese forces and protect remaining American troops. But privately, some American officials suggested that the bombings might take on another, more ominous, character—that of pure punishment. As one State Department officer declared last week, "The President feels he has been abused personally by North Vietnam's current offensive."

In a sense, wider bombing raids are the only realistic option available to the President as a means of blunting Communist military assaults. There are too few American combat troops remaining in South Vietnam to be effective against Hanoi's forces, even if Mr. Nixon wanted to order the available GI's back into the ground war. In addition, Mr. Nixon can point to the fact that U.S. tactical bombing has achieved some short-term results during the current Communist offensive. American air strikes on North Vietnamese troop positions in the south have inflicted severe casualties on Hanoi's forces and have reportedly destroyed scores of Communist tanks. Moreover, the air campaign in the north has no doubt diminished Hanoi's capability to launch subsequent attacks in the future and has taken a harsh toll in terms of military matériel held in reserve.

Yet the weight of evidence over the years suggests that much of America's bombing has been in vain. Shortly after he took office, Mr. Nixon received National Security Study Memorandum No. 1, a secret report that strongly indicated that bombing had not played a decisive role in Vietnam. Yet only a week before Hanoi initiated its current offensive, U.S. officials were still claiming that bombing had interdicted more than 98 per cent of the supplies North Vietnam had tried to move down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the previous four months. When the attack began, however, the Communists swarmed into South Vietnam behind the very equipment—tanks, artillery and rockets—that the U.S. claimed to have destroyed. And since the offensive began it has become clear that, like strategic bombing, close air support of ground troops also has limited utility—at least when the ground forces involved lack the will to fight. Despite hundreds of U.S. air strikes against enemy troop concentrations north of Quang Tri, for example, the North Vietnamese seemed to have little trouble capturing that provincial capital.

Still, the U.S. continues to view air

continued

power as something close to the ultimate weapon. When a U.S. Air Force officer in Saigon was questioned recently about the effectiveness of the bombing campaign, he replied, "I wouldn't know about that, but we have 'smarter' bombs and new, improved sensors now." And as if to emphasize beyond any doubt its heavy reliance on bombing, the Administration last week sent yet another attack aircraft carrier into action off the Vietnamese coast.

In short, the President seems determined to meet the new challenge in Vietnam with an old policy—and one that has always been of questionable wisdom. That air power plays a significant role in modern warfare, no one can deny. But to imply that it can somehow serve as a substitute for adequately trained and motivated ground forces flies in the face of military history.

3

Pictorial Parade

Vietnamization

Few of his foreign programs can be more important to Richard Nixon than Vietnamization. And none has received more Presidential pats on the back. A year ago, Mr. Nixon flatly stated, "I can report that Vietnamization has succeeded." In the months that followed the President repeatedly lauded the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and insisted that Vietnamization was working—even though it had never really been put to the test. But inevitably the test came—and whether the ARVN will pass or fail remains a moot question. Though some ARVN units have fought gallantly, other South Vietnamese troops fled the battle of Quang Tri in panic, deserted in droves, abandoned their wounded and, in Hué, even turned on their own comrades.

Technically, the White House has been correct in saying that the ARVN has the capability to stand alone. The South Vietnamese armed forces both outnumber and outgun their Communist adversaries—and enjoy the luxury of almost unlimited air support. Perhaps it was with this in mind that Defense Secretary Melvin Laird confidently predicted last January that the South Vietnamese forces would win "75 per cent or more" of the battles in the event of a Communist offensive. Yet since the current offensive began, Saigon's forces have failed to score a conclusive victory in any major battle. The best they have been able to do is to hold tenuously to the provincial capital of An Loc north of Saigon, which admittedly has been a considerable achievement in the face of intensive and continuous Communist artillery barrages. But even at An Loc, the ARVN has had to abandon its attempts to destroy the North Vietnamese troops that are still besieging the town.

Somewhat surprisingly, Pentagon officials now openly admit that the Vietnamization program "hangs by a few threads." Perhaps the fatal flaw in Vietnamization has been the inability of the United States to instill in the South Vietnamese soldier the esprit and determination necessary to take on Hanoi's highly motivated and tightly disciplined troops. It was relatively easy for the United States to hand out the rifles, the artillery, the attack planes and the tanks that the ARVN lacked—something the U.S. did in a $10 billion crash program. But last week, when more U.S. tanks arrived in South Vietnam to replace those lost to the Communists, one U.S. official in Saigon snapped, "For Christ's sake, they don't need more damn equipment. They need some guts."

There is considerably more to the problem than that, however. What the ARVN primarily needs are honest and efficient commanders. And in South Vietnam's corrupt and nepotistic military establishment, such men have always been in short supply. "There are many people here in important jobs who are unequal to the task," said one South Vietnamese official last week. "The one thing the Americans could not bring in from their arsenal was leadership."

The Nixon Administration's misplaced confidence in the ability of the ARVN is hard to comprehend. In seven years of intimate and painful involvement in Vietnam, U.S. military leaders had every opportunity to perceive and correct the shortcomings in the South Vietnamese forces. But, as NEWSWEEK's Saigon bureau chief Nicholas C. Proffitt reported last week: "The Administration could not see the flaws in Vietnamization because of self-imposed blinders. Since Vietnamization, as defined by President Nixon, is the last American option in Vietnam, it simply had to work. The only alternative would be to admit that the Administration has failed. When this attitude at the very top is so ill-concealed, it is inevitable that it will filter down and subordinates will don a matching set of blinders. Nice things do not happen to the careers of men who fail to see the emperor's new clothes." In the case of Vietnamization, the Nixon Administration apparently saw what it wanted to see and believed what it hoped would prove true. The result has been that a policy designed by the President to extricate the United States from the war has become a policy that threatens to prolong the agonizing and costly American involvement in Indochina.